

## **SOUTH WARD COMMUNITY DISASTER RECOVERY COMMITTEE**

*The Committee works with the communities in the South Ward of Latrobe City:*

*Yinnar, Yinnar South, Budgerie, Boolarra, Jeeralang, Jumbuk, Churchill, Darlimurla, Delburn, Mirboo East, Jeeralang Junction, Grand Ridge, Boolarra South.*

### ***Submission to the Australian Government Regional Telecommunications Review 30.9.21***

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***This submission may be made public.***

I wish to provide the following information about the ongoing telecommunication issues in the South Ward of Latrobe City.

#### **1. Internet connections and use:**

- a. People in the towns of Yinnar and Boolarra have access to the NBN at their homes. Some of the towns closer to Yinnar and Boolarra also have access to the NBN. This service is often unreliable.
- b. People in the smaller towns/more remote areas can access the internet via satellite, mobile hotspot (if mobile connection is available).
- c. During the recent storm in July 2021, the ward lost most internet connection, and in some places it took 5 days to be reconnected. Many people were isolated at home, unable to travel out due to the roads being blocked by fallen trees and debris or by flooding.
- d. Service to provide or rectify internet access in the area can take a month or more, depending on the provider.

#### **2. Landline telephone connection and use:**

- a. Most areas have access to landlines and rely on these for community connectedness like “phone trees” to contact each other in case of emergencies like bushfires.
- b. During the recent storm and flood event, even the local police officer in Boolarra lost all communications including two landline services.
- c. Many people did not renew their landlines when mobile phones became an option, as they were told landlines would become obsolete. These people now wish they had kept the landlines for safety and because of the “hit and miss” nature of the mobile phones.
- d. The NBN wireless towers only have a very short-term battery backup, which was not long enough in the recent flood/storm. This meant people who still retained their landlines also had no access, and they tell us they did not realise this would be an issue when they transferred their landlines to the NBN. It also meant they did not have NBN Broadband access.

- e. Following the 2009 Delburn and Black Saturday fires, the inquiry recommendation was for greatly improved communication in this area. The people in this community doubt anything has improved, and question whether any follow up work occurred.

**3. Mobile telephone connection and use:**

- a. Mobile phone connection in the area is very much a “hit and miss” affair. Most residents know which parts of their house or property they need to stand in to be able to get enough mobile service for it to work.
- b. During the recent storm and flood event, mobile phone connection was essential for residents who were unable to leave their properties due to damaged roads, landslips, fallen trees and floods.
- c. It took several weeks for the electricity and phone towers to be re-established and connected after the event.
- d. Many people could not recharge their mobile phones due to the electricity being lost in the storm. People could not get out to get generators, meaning they could be 5km from town but yet completely isolated.
- e. Backup batteries on the mobile towers did not last long enough (approx. 4 hours) after the storm hit, and access to the towers was difficult given the steep terrain and the damage caused by the storm.

**4. Television connection and use:**

- a. Most residents can access free to air TV from the Mt Tassie transmitter, subject to weather incidents that also affect the transmitter or electricity.
- b. Many people choose to access the paid networks like Netflix, but this is subject to how well their internet access works, and can be very inconsistent.